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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted during the spring of 1999 school semester to examine the implementation of the University-Middle School E-mail Buddy Project. This project gave eighth grade and college students the opportunity to pair up electronically via e-mail and exchange discourse that focused on such issues as language arts activities and instructional methods employed at the middle school, and the nature of college living, in addition to sharing each other's writing samples. In the process of investigation for this study, an in-depth analysis of the e-mail messages exchanged between the students was conducted. Also, the students' written summaries of their experiences were examined. An attitude survey for both groups of students was distributed as well. This is to gain better understanding as to how their participation in this project had affected them academically, socially and emotionally. Finally, a focus group comprised of eighth grade students was held to gain insight into reflections about and reactions to the experience. Findings indicate growth and benefits for both groups of students related to their participation in the project. (Author/RS)

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ED 447 499

"You've Got Mail":

Electronic Mail in the Writing Classroom

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Abstract

This study was conducted during Spring of 1999 school semester to examine the implementation of the University-Middle School E-mail Buddy Project. This project gave eighth grade and college students the opportunity to pair up electronicaliy via e-mail and exchange discourse that focused on such issues as language arts activities and instructional methods employed at the middle school, and the nature of college living, in addition to sharing each,other's writing samples.

In the process of investigation for this study an in depth analysis of the e-mail messages exchanged between the students was conducted. Also, the student's written summaries of their experience were examined. An attitude survey for both groups of students was distributed as well. This is to gain better understanding as to how their participation in this project had affected them academically, socially and emotionally. Finally, a focus group comprised of eight grade students was held to gain insight into reflections about and reactions to the experience.

"You learn to read by reading, and you learn to write by writing"

This phrase is one that educators read and hear often and strive to implement in their classrooms in the attempt to provide their students with learning experiences that will last them a lifetime. As educators emphasize the need to have students writing in order for them to learn the processes that writing entails, they also stress the need to create learning situations that are authentic, functional and purposeful. This is what makes learning meaningful and brings about long lasting results that will carry on to real-life situations. Therefore, teachers are in an ever lasting search for learning activities, projects and experiences that will engage the whole student; cognitively, socially and emotionally. In today's language arts programs teachers are looking beyond paper and pen tasks and activities through which students may practice and develop their writing skills.

Computers have been one of the non-traditional instructional mediums that have been tried and have proven their place in the writing class in that they can provide students with the natural context through which they can practice and master writing skills. Electronic mail is one form of computer technology that is gaining widespread recognition in educational settings. D'Souza (1992) identifies several educational applications of e-mail:

- Use of e-mail as a form of communication between teachers and students facilitates the teacher's response to student's inquiries and requests regarding course content.
- E-mail serves as a medium of communication between teacher and student to convey information about assignments, homework and exams.
- It facilitates discussion of projects and work with tutors.

- It brings together people of common interest, and promotes discussion and exchange of ideas amongst them.
- E-mail can be used to develop correspondence projects by pairing students with writing partners from other places.
- E-mail encourages and facilitates cooperative learning and team projects amongst students.

As such, electronic mail collaborative projects are finding their way into writing classes today.

E-mail Collaborative Projects

Writing instruction today has changed considerably from how it was in the past Today's writing instruction perceives the writing process as an act of communication; communication between the writers and their audiences, whether this audience is comprised of peers, teachers, community members or beyond. While e-mail can never replace teachers, it can however play a supportive role by fulfilling the communicative role for young writers (McKeon & Burkey, 1998), as literacy learning is not only defined as a process of merely decoding and encoding of texts but also as a communicative process that entails a contribution to society.

This perspective supports the notion that students learn to read and write by reading and writing within a community of readers and writers. By using e-mail, the community is broadened to transcend time and distance; to include people from remote areas and distant countries; to connect people with differing cultures, beliefs and perspectives.

Social events and interactions play an important role in developing student's writing. E-mail correspondence allows students to communicate with real audiences and through their communication learn different purposes for writing. E-mail correspondence between writing partners encourages students to seek information, share ideas, receive feedback on their writing and reflect on it in the process of generating new ideas, drafting, revising and editing (Piazza, 1988).

E-mail collaborative projects can help fulfill the needs of student writers as they provide them with the opportunity to experience the writing process while at the same time providing the much needed audience. In these projects the teacher organizes 'key-pals' for their students to write to, usually it is in coordination with other teachers and their students from different schools, cities or countries. Through their correspondence students learn about writing as well as learn about the communities of the people they are writing to, as they share their writings, gain new perspectives, exchange information and develop a better sense of audience. In these projects, teachers might require their students to write up an evaluation of their writing experience, keep a record of their messages, or share some of the messages with the class (Anderson & Lee, 1995).

This paper examines the implementation of an e-mail collaborative project between education students and eighth graders. The paper reviews the goals, guidelines, processes and outcome of the project, including reflections of some of the participating students.

The University/Middle School E-mail Buddy Project

The University/Middle School E-mail Buddy Project was first implemented during the 1997-1998 school year. The goal of this project was to provide the college students with an opportunity to utilize technology to learn about language arts activities

and instructional methods in the middle school level of education. In the process, they had the opportunity to gain insight into the writing abilities of eighth grade students. At the same time, and on a more contributive level, the college students were participating in service learning by acting as mentors for their younger e-mail buddies (Kaminski, 1999). As for the eighth grade students of the Middle School, the goal of this project for them was to have a live audience to share their writing with, and receive feedback from. This form of audience provides students with a differing viewpoint than that which they receive from their teacher and peers which tends to become stagnant and invariable over time.

An additional objective for the middle school students was to learn about college life and all that it entails from their e-mail partners. In addition, this project integrated technology in the classroom as an information resource tool. Both groups of students were involved in the dynamic processes that writing entails such as the selection and organization of information, preparation of drafts, revising and editing.

Research Method

Participants

The project involved 50 University undergraduate education majors enrolled in a course titled 'Language Arts in the Classroom'. The 50 eighth grade Middle School participants were enrolled in a creative writing, journalism, or literature class.

Procedure

The University-Middle School E-mail Buddy Project was conducted over a twelve-week period. Both groups of students were required to send ten messages to their

e-mail buddy who was randomly selected by their instructor. The main topics of discussion focused on the following areas:

- The language arts program at the middle school in terms of content, activities, and instructional methodology. The specific elements of interest were literature, oral language, writing, and language tools.
- Campus life and discussion of all aspects of what college education entailed in terms of courses, expectations, work loads, study habits, tuition, living accommodations, and entertainment.
- Sharing and discussing the student's writing products such as short stories, editorials, and poems. In addition, students had to provide their buddies with feedback on the writing pieces that they shared with each other.

The eighth grade students were given a weekly list of pre-selected topics by their teacher to discuss. This not only provided students with subject matter to guide and prompt them in their correspondence, but also aided in making sure that all relevant issues are addressed in the effort to achieve the determined goals. Also, the Middle School students were required to submit rough drafts and weekly copies of the messages sent and received, this helped the students to maintain a steady pace in their correspondence and avoid falling behind. At the same time this facilitated the evaluation process for the teacher for this project, and helped her in assuring that the objectives for this project are met.

Both groups were required to keep a notebook that contained all of the messages that were sent and received. At the end of the project, students were required to prepare a written summary of their experiences. This summary contained an analysis of the

messages, a summary of their contents, and a reflection on some aspects related to the relationship between the two e-mail buddies. Students are asked to reflect on how well they had been able to answer their buddy's inquires, how helpful they thought they were to them, and in what way did they support their partner's growth in writing. Both groups were also required to share their experiences with their classmates, and make recommendations to their instructor about the benefits and problems associated with this project.

Findings

Four forms of data were used to develop an understanding of the student's experiences as they progressed through the project:

Content of E-mail Messages

Content analysis was used to analyze the randomly selected e-mail messages of six Middle School students and six University students. The messages were analyzed on five different aspects:

1. Discussion Topic:

In analyzing the student's messages to determine the focus of discourse, it was found that the primary focus in topics was related to the specific objectives that each group had and which were provided to them by their instructor. As such, it was found that the middle school student's messages usually contained samples of their writings. The number of pieces that each student shared with their e-mail buddy came to an average of two pieces throughout the project. The types of writing the students shared were diverse and various in nature. Examples included short stories, articles and editorials for the school newspaper, poems, and character sketches.

Another goal for the Middle School student's was to learn about college and the nature of the college student's lives. Students asked questions relating to accommodations and dorm life, financial concerns (tuition, expenses, jobs), social activities (making friends, coping with the separation from home family and old friends), academics (the nature of courses taken, how they are taught, how instructor expectations differ from those at the middle school, the variation of work load for each class, the differences in student behavior in class as compared to middle school), and the different responsibilities that college students have to undertake for themselves (time management, and study habits).

In their initial letter, the Middle School students introduced themselves briefly to their new key-pals by talking about their personalities, family, interests and hobbies, friends, home life, pets, and school life. The majority of students shared in detail news of their weekend activities, trips or upcoming holidays and plans for those holidays, extracurricular school events, and complaints of problems or incidents with peers.

The Middle School student's messages also included answers to their buddy's questions about the different aspects of the language arts program, in fact two thirds of the length of their messages was devoted to this topic. They tended to elaborate in their responses about the activities they engaged in these classes and the different instructional techniques the teachers used in these classes. They gave examples of what was done in class. The middle school students knew that this was one of the main goals for the University students and most of them tried to provide as much information as possible for their buddies. They would accompany their answers with comments such as:

" Since we are nearing the end of this project I just wanted to ask you if you needed any additional information."

"That was my favorite activity when I was in school. Maybe you should try it."

Several Middle School students asked their older college buddies for samples of their writing in order to gain insight into the quality of writing of college students and the degree of difference between middle school and college level writing. The following is a request that one Middle School student made to his e-mail buddy:

"I would like to see a sample of your own work so I could see "quality" college writing, instead of adolescent's writings for a change and to help my own writing."

As for the University student's messages, their major goal for this project was to gain insight into the language arts program in terms of literature activities, oral language activities, writing activities, and language tools activities. They needed to learn about the instructional techniques that the teachers employed in the classroom, as well as learn about the different activities that the middles school teachers implemented in order to add to their repertoire of potential activities that they may implement themselves in the future. As such, nearly every message from the University students contained one question to the younger buddy about these aspects of their language arts classes. Other areas of discussion that college students engaged in were answering their buddy's questions about college life and sharing their current events and campus activities.

The University students shared some of their writing samples with their e-mail buddy. All the students shared a bio poem they had written. Some college students shared children's books they had written for their Language Arts course. Moreover, the college students explained to their younger buddies what they were currently learning in the

Language Arts class. Both groups of student's messages contained courteous comments and supportive feedback on their partner's writing samples that they have received.

The elapsed time between receiving and sending a message was also examined. It was found that the Middle School students were more apt to reply to the buddies within five days. However, the University students tended to take more time in replying to their buddy as it took an average of eight days to send their replies. It was further noted that the Middle School students tended to write new messages weekly regardless of whether they received a reply to their previous message or not. The reason for this is due to differences in the guidelines that are given to the two groups of students by their instructors. The Middle School students were required to send weekly messages addressing the specific topic assigned by their teacher. The students were graded for meeting this criterion. As for the University students, due to their level of maturity, as they were expected to take responsibility for timely response to their buddies' messages, they were not given a time limit for sending their messages. The only guideline they were required to meet in terms of replying to the messages they received is that they send a minimum of ten messages. The excuse that the college students provided for the delay was usually related to overwhelming course workload.

2. Dialogue Content:

The e-mail messages were analyzed to determine the nature of dialogue that took place, in particular, the types of social acknowledgments exchanged, and how they provided each other with feedback on their writing.

In terms of social acknowledgments it was found that both groups of students maintained a stable level of respect for each other. They acknowledged each other's

accomplishments and clearly expressed their support and excitement for the personal events they shared with each other. In addition, students regularly expressed their gratitude to each other for sharing their writing samples. They tended to express their support cordially and enthusiastically.

" It sounds like you are getting a lot of good writing experience this year. That is great! I love to write!"

Both groups also were very empathetic to each other's problems and difficulties. The students not only provided their buddies with sympathetic acknowledgment but also shared their own experiences to show how they could relate to what their buddy was experiencing. This helped students to find commonalties between each other and strengthen the relationship.

The students seemed to become more open to expressing their personal views and perspectives after exchanging a couple of messages with each other, perhaps due to overcoming the initial period of getting to know one another. Middle School students expressed their personal opinions on academic topics ranging from the benefits of teaching spelling and grammar in eighth grade to the need for assigning homework. The Middle School student's statements were candid and direct, apparently free of the obligation to write what older people want to hear, but rather forthright in their opinions. An example of this is one Middle School student's response to her buddy's question as to how important she thought spelling tests were in middle school:

"...I don't think that spelling in middle school is very helpful. If the teachers actually taught the words, like took a class period or two to actually go over the words and make

sure everyone understood, that might be worth it, but just giving us the words and saying "learn them by Friday"? No, that isn't very important."

Analysis of the messages showed that most students tended to briefly comment about each other's writing products, using polite phrases, pleasant encouragement and positive reflections. Students expressed their support for each other and offered encouragement:

" I liked your poem; it was really good. It sounds like you know a lot about poetry. Your poetry booklet will be quite impressive when you are finished with it."

3. Dialogue Depth:

The aspect of dialogue depth, the writer's ability to elaborate on the different issues within their messages, was measured in terms of the message's length, flow of dialogue, thoroughness, and detail. On the average, the Middle School students' messages tended to be longer and contained more elaboration than the University students' messages. This was due in part to The teacher's requirement that her students write a minimum of two paragraphs and cover the assigned topics from the rubric. The Middle School buddies also provided their University buddies with examples of class activities, more writing pieces, and an inclination to share more of their personal lives. The University student's messages on the other hand tended to be brief but adequate and provided the Middle School students with the needed information. The University students also touched upon their class projects but shared less of their writing pieces. The University students did share some personal information with their buddies but did not go into as much detail in that aspect of discourse.

4. Course Inquiry:

This aspect of the analysis investigated how students were able to direct the discussion to the course content in their language arts programs, and what were the course related topics that were discussed. The Middle School students were given pre-selected topics that had to be addressed each week. These topics involved inquiry into college life, explanations of the types of writing they are involved with in class, and providing their partner with samples of their writing. Besides these per-selected topics, the Middle School students ventured on their own to address other topics of interest to them such as inquiring about the personal lives of their buddies, discussion of hobbies or commonalties.

The University students were most interested in finding out about the type of writing middles school students were involved in, the language tools that were used in class, the oral language activities that they participated in, and different aspects of the language arts program implemented at the Middle School. To learn about these aspects the college students posed their questions at the end of their messages providing their buddies with topics to address in their subsequent responses. These inquiries were direct and straightforward, as both partners were aware of the goals that they had to meet in this project.

5. Mentorship:

Mentorship was found to have a subtle presence in this project rather than to have been its driving force. Mentoring was evident in how the college students conducted their conversations and in providing information to their younger buddies. Many Middle School students were in awe of corresponding with a college student, which made the college students very aware of their role as a possible role model for their younger

partners. The University students conducted their correspondence accordingly. They were careful not to disclose any information about college life that would be deemed inappropriate. They also conveyed their support and understanding of how difficult it is to be in Middle School by relating their own experiences of when they were of similar age.

6. Attitudes:

Analysis of the messages shows that both groups were equally excited about participating in such a project in the beginning of correspondence. But by mid-point through the project a few Middle School students tended to express annoyance to having to adhere to a certain agenda in their writing of messages, they expressed their wish for more freedom in their correspondence. Nonetheless, the overall attitude revealed a satisfaction and pleasure found in their participation, this was revealed in their excitement at receiving a response from their college buddy and their eagerness to respond. It was also found that the type of topics that were discussed significantly determined the degree of satisfaction the students expressed towards the project, as the more contented students were those who received personal, non-school related comments in their buddies' messages. As for the University students their pleasure in participation was related to their buddies' helpfulness in providing them with the information needed for completion of their requirement for the project.

Student Summary Statements

An analysis of the University student's summaries of their experiences in this project showed a focus on the different elements of the language arts program implemented in a middle school. The students had analyzed the messages of their eighth grade buddies for the four different components of the language arts program; oral language, writing, language tools and classroom instruction. The college students cited from their buddies' messages examples of each component. These examples included activities that the students were engaged in, writing samples of the eighth graders, and instructional strategies that the middles school students thought effective. In their summaries, they also incorporated the perspectives of their Middle School buddies about the different aspects of the program factoring in the student's viewpoint as an important element in the program.

The college students ended their summaries with a reflection on this experience and how they thought this project effected their outlook on their future roles as language arts teachers. Many of the students stated that their discourse with the eighth graders had given them important insight into the minds, thoughts, opinions and level of thinking of eighth grade students.

"This project has influenced my development as a teacher in that I have been exposed to the student's point of view. I believe that you almost have to think like the student to be able to teach the subject matter."

Attitude Surveys

An attitude survey was developed and distributed amongst both groups of students at the end of the semester to determine their personal perspectives and attitudes towards this project. From the 50 participants in the e-mail project from The Middle School 50 students responded to the attitude survey. From the 50 undergraduate students who participated in this project 49 students responded.

Analysis of the common items on surveys for both groups' responses revealed that an overwhelming majority of participants from both groups had enjoyed participating in this project, this majority was comprised of 92 % of the Middle School students and 98% of the University students. Only one student from the Middle School was discontent with their participation in this project, compared to only one college student who was unsure of their feelings towards this project.

To further investigate the factors that have led to the satisfaction of the students or otherwise, the survey items probed into different aspects of the project. To assess whether promptness was a significant factor in this project, students were asked about how prompt they were in replying to their buddy's messages. Promptness was specified by no later than two days after receiving a message. Fifty-two percent of the Middle School students felt that they were prompt in their replies while only 12 % did not feel that they were. On the other hand, 55 % of the college students felt that their responses were well timed, compared to 31 % of the students who sent their responses later than two days. When asked whether a buddy's delay in responding would affect their enthusiasm towards the project, seventy-eight percent of the Middle School students and 72 % of the college students felt that it had.

Other survey items focused on the e-mail buddy's satisfaction with their partner's willingness to provide them with rich and sufficient information about the topics that they needed to learn about from one another. Eighty-two percent of the Middle School students felt that their buddy's answers were satisfactory, compared to 72 % of University students who were content with the responses they received from the Middle School students. Only 8% of the Middle School students felt that their buddy had not provided them with enough information about the topics of interest, whereas 28 % of the University students were dissatisfied with their buddy's responses. However, when asked if the responses were at least insightful, 54% of the Middle School students and 71 % of the University students felt that their buddy's responses were rich enough to give them sufficient information to complete their project and achieve their goals.

Furthermore, Students were asked about specific areas of interest which they inquired about to determine specifically what aspects of their buddy's responses were satisfactory or otherwise. When asked whether their understanding of college life had increased due to the buddy project. 90% of Middle School students replied that their correspondence with their college buddies had in fact helped them gain better insight of college life, but 50% of the students felt that there were still some aspects of college life that were not quite clear to them. To gain insight about how this aspect had effected their outlook on attending college, students were asked whether they had planned to attend college before participating in this project, 88% replied that they did. However, this percentage increased significantly to 96% after completion of the project, this increase implies a positive attitude change towards college after corresponding with the college

students. Only one Middle School student expressed disinterest in attending college before and after the project.

When asked whether they were apprehensive at sharing their writing pieces with their buddy's especially since they had not personally met each other, 80% of Middle School students had no qualms at all about showing their older buddies their writing products, however, 90% of University students were apprehensive. The participants were asked if the feedback they received from their older buddies on their writing pieces was useful, 76% of the Middle School students felt it was. In addition, 60% of the Middle School students felt that the feedback helped them think about their writing and gain new perspective on it and 40% reported that they had made changes in their writing pieces based on the constructive feedback that they received from their University buddies.

The University students were also asked about the specific objectives that they had coming into this project and whether they felt that they had achieved these goals during and after completion of the project. Eighty-seven percent of the University students believed that they had in fact learned much from their eighth grade buddy about the language arts program implemented at their school. Specifically, 73% of the students felt that they had gained much insight about the oral language in the language arts classes that were taught. Seventy-seven percent felt that they gained knowledge about the language tools employed in the language arts classes, and 90% thought that they had learned much about the type of writing in which the Middle School students were involved.

In addition, 71% of the University students felt that this project helped them gain insight into the instructional techniques that the language arts teachers employed with

their students. In the survey, 61% of the college students did express their enthusiasm towards adopting the techniques they learnt about from their younger buddies when they themselves become teachers. This was also expressed often by the college student to their partners in the context of their messages, as they would often comment on their excitement about a certain technique and inform their buddies that they planned to use this method or activity in their future teaching careers.

Finally, the aspect of mentoring was explored in this survey to determine whether this was a factor that was present during the project and whether it had any contribution to its success. Both groups of students were asked about the level of depth that the relationship between them had reached. Fifty-two percent of the Middle School students and 71% of the University students came into the project with high expectations as to building a strong relationship with their e-mail buddies. But upon completion of the project, 62% of the Middle School students and 72% of the University students found that they had actually built a very good relationship with their buddy. This stability amongst the college students attitude and positive change in the middle school student's attitude indicates that a personal aspect had come into play in this project, extending the correspondence from the mere give and take of required information to a more deeper level of emotional investment and attachment.

Further, 80% of the Middle School students and 73% of the University students found many commonalties between themselves and their buddies. Asked whether they discussed personal issues, 66% of Middle School students and 80% of University students did converse about personal issues such as family, hobbies, plans for the future, and experiences relating to middle school or college. Fifty-two percent of the middle

school students shared their problems with their older buddies, and 74% said that they found the advice they received was useful and beneficial to them.

When asked if they had plans to maintain correspondence after the completion of the project, 78% of Middle School students and 81% of the University students replied positively. Finally, when asked as to whether they would like to participate in a similar project in the future 84% of Middle School students and 82% of the University students expressed their enthusiasm towards taking part in a similar project.

Focus Group Summary

For the focus group session six Middle School students were selected to participate, this group was comprised of female students. Four students had participated in this project as a partial requirement for their literature class, the other two students were enrolled in the journalism class. The purpose of the focus group was to further examine the specific aspects of the project that students felt had an effective impact on them, as well as touch upon the areas that they felt could be improved upon. One of the topics of discussion were their initial expectations of this project, and if that had changed after engaging in the process. The group was divided to the apprehensive group and the enthusiastic group. The former group of students were inexperienced in the use of e-mail as a form of communication and had stated that they were unsure of their ability to handle their school work while maintaining their timely correspondence. However, they also revealed that as they became immersed in the project, they came to find a balance that brought with it and the ability to enjoy the project.

The latter group of students had expressed their enthusiasm for the project from the start. These are students who had had prior experience with e-mail correspondence and have the comfort that comes with familiarity.

When asked about the difficulty of communicating with a stranger, one student stated that she did not feel that she was corresponding with a person, due to the impersonal nature of e-mail correspondence, and the feeling of writing to a monitor instead of a person. This student explained that at the end of the semester when both University and Middle School students were united at the University, her feelings of impersonality had changed as she had put a face to the person she had been corresponding with. She stated that her emotional detachment had been altered after this meeting, and that she had developed a more personal approach to the project afterwards.

One student revealed that she preferred the impersonal nature of e-mail correspondence and how it had reflected on the content of her messages. She explained that because it was a person she does not know and has not seen before, she felt more comfortable in sharing intimate and personal information with her, such as problems with school and family life. This student felt that there was safety and security in the partially anonymous nature of this project. However, after meeting with her college buddy at the end of the semester, this student stated that she lost some of her freedom of expressing herself.

Most students declared that having a predetermined list of topics given to them by Their teacher which they were required to address was necessary to help them stay on task and compelled them to cover the essential issues to meet the objectives of the project. However, at times they felt that this did not give them enough time to talk about

other more personal issues they wished to delve in. As such, most students expressed their wish for less structure and more freedom in terms of the topics covered in their messages.

When asked if they intended to maintain and resume correspondence with their college buddies even after completion of the project all of the students expressed their desire to do so. One student thought that post-project correspondence would be even more enjoyable because they would not have an agenda to follow, permitting them to discuss only issues of interest to both buddies. It was concluded from the student's reactions on this issue that they had a strong need to discuss personal issue with their buddy and that this would be more feasible in their correspondence after the project's completion.

As the discussion shifted to how they felt about writing to an older person as opposed to a peer, many of the students felt that this was an advantage. The Middle School students felt that due to the maturity of the college buddies they were well respected and taken seriously by them. The students also explained that because their buddies were older they could relate to the Middle School experiences and empathize with them, while at the same time advise, support and prepare them for what's to come in high school and college.

The focus then turned to discussions about whether their writing had been affected by this project. One student stated that because her college buddy shared her own writing with her she was able to gain insight into the type of writing college students were involved in and therefore had the opportunity to draw comparisons between her own writing and her partner's. This, she stated, helped her understand what would be

expected of her in her future college life, and thus, helped prepare her for the type and level of work that she anticipates to perform.

On a different level of influence, two of the students noted how they felt that their buddy's feedback helped in improving their self esteem and how they felt about their own writing. Their buddy's words of encouragement and support helped keep them motivated to write more and not give up easily at times of discouragement.

The Middle School students offered a variety of reasons for maintaining their commitment to the project. On the one hand they felt a responsibility towards their college buddies in terms of providing them with the necessary information they needed to complete their requirements for the project. The Middle School students were also driven by the need to complete their own required weekly tasks that were assigned to them by their teacher. Another impetus was the desire to learn about the different aspects of college life, an area of which they had great interest. Some of the students added that they were motivated to write to their buddy out of desire to learn about them as a person. Their buddy's willingness to share facts and information about themselves increased their intrigue.

Conclusion

Computers today have taken a prominent place in the classroom, and E-mail collaborative projects have shown to have positive effects in the contemporary writing class due to their multi-purpose nature. The study of the University/Middle School E-mail Collaborative Project indicated growth and benefits for both groups of students related to their participation in the project.

One of the most salient conclusions is that the students were very goal oriented in their approach to this project, all of the students felt compelled to address the issues that they were required to investigate. But at the same time as each buddy had differing needs, each partner felt the responsibility of providing sufficient information for their partner so that they may meet their project objectives as well. This reciprocal sense of responsibility towards each other guided the students in their correspondence and helped maintain the level of responsible penmanship that was needed for the successful completion of the project.

The University students were able to learn about the different areas in a middle school language arts program. They were able to gain insight into the thought processes of the middle school student and thus learn from them how best to approach their teaching careers while still incorporating the needs of the students. The University students had also taken on the role of mentors for their younger buddies and as such had felt the responsibility towards providing them with the support and guidance they needed.

The Middle School students on the other hand felt the responsibility of providing their older buddies with the information they needed for completion of their project and strove to provide them with sufficient information about their language arts program, activities, instructional strategies and personal perspectives on related issues. They also supplemented their messages with samples of their writing to give an idea as to what type of writing they were involved in, in addition to getting feedback about it. The Middle School students benefited immensely from corresponding with college students in terms of obtaining information about the different aspects of college life. They were able to

gain insight into this ambiguous part of their future thus shedding light on an issue that is very important to them.

For this group of students from the University and the Middle School this project was a rewarding and memorable experience which many students have expressed their desire to engage in again in the future. As a multi-dimensional learning tool, e-mail collaborative projects have taken a important role in today's language arts programs and the various levels of service they provide to students and instructors alike imply their longevity in the educational arena.

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